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Voter ID is Good for Texas
by Senator Troy Fraser

Voting is one of the most fundamental rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. And as Justice William Brennan put it, "one man, one vote" is the very basis of our democratic system of government.

But unfortunately some would undermine our fundamental rights. Consider, for example, the Beeville woman who was convicted of voting for her dead mother. And the Corpus Christi suspect who was charged with a felony for stepping in front of an elderly couple--who she claimed to be helping at the polls--and illegally casting their ballots. Or the former city councilwoman who was sentenced to five years in prison after illegally registering non-citizens to vote.

These are a few examples of election fraud that authorities managed to catch. But under the current system, our democracy remains vulnerable because citizens are not required to adequately verify their identities at the polls. Now is the time to change our laws to prevent political operatives and others from undermining legitimate votes on Election Day.

Though Texans must show a photo ID in order to get on an airplane, obtain a hunting license, enter many government buildings or even make purchase at a Sam's Club, the law does not require that voters produce a photo ID before they enter the ballot box.

All voters have to do is show a voter registration card. Is it possible for John to vote using Bill's registration card? Absolutely. Could he cast that very same ballot if he had to show identification? Absolutely not.

My Democrat colleagues who oppose the so-called 'voter ID' law argue that the requirements will suppress turnout among minorities, the poor and the elderly.

I disagree. But don't take it from me--here are the facts:

In Georgia, which has a voter ID law, the 2008 presidential election marked a 5% increase in African-American voter turnout. And in Indiana, which has the nation's most stringent photo identification law, Democrat voter turnout increased by nearly 8.5%.

Equally important, despite numerous legal challenges, opponents have failed to persuade the courts that requiring a photo ID leads to voter suppression. As the liberal Justice John Paul Stevens noted in his opinion upholding Indiana's voter ID law, the challengers failed to find a

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single Indiana resident who would be unable to vote because of the photo identification requirement. Importantly, the U.S. Supreme Court rejected the challenge to the Indiana law and found that it was entirely constitutional.

Unfortunately, when it comes to protecting the integrity of the ballot box, Texas is behind the curve. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, the following states already have photo identification requirements: Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, Michigan, and South Dakota. And in Mexico, voters must present a valid identification card with a photograph and embedded security codes.

So I am offering Texas voters new protections that will prevent fraud at the ballot box. But importantly, the legislation I filed will not send anyone away from the polling place without being able to cast their ballot.

Senate Bill 362 will require voters to show either one form of photo identification or two other forms of non-photo identification. The non-photo identification can be a utility bill, mail from a government entity or even a library card. And voters who cannot produce acceptable forms of identification will still be allowed to cast a provisional ballot.

So despite all the rhetoric some might hear from the opposition, let me be clear: No eligible voter will walk away from a polling location without being able to cast their ballot.

The Texas Senate Committee of the Whole will be debating this legislation on Tuesday March 10th. I encourage all Texans to contact their elected officials and express their opinion on this very important issue.

But concerned Texans should keep recent history in mind. In 2000, the presidential election was decided by just 537 votes in Florida. At this very moment, the critical 60th vote in the United States Senate is being fought in the courts because the election outcome depends upon just a couple hundred votes in Minnesota. And right here in Texas, control of the House of Representatives hung on a legislative election that was won by just 19 votes.

Those small margins show that every single vote counts. And every fraudulent vote effectively steals a legitimate vote. Election fraud not only undermines the voters' intent--it strikes at the heart of our democratic system of government. Elections are too important to leave unprotected when the Legislature could take proactive steps to prevent fraud and protect our democracy.

Senate Bill 362 legislation is not a radical concept--it just asks that all Texans verify that "you are who you say you are" before casting your ballot.

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Senator Troy Fraser (R - Horseshoe Bay) represents 21 counties in the geographic center of Texas. He serves as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Business and Commerce and sits on the Senate Committees on Finance, State Affairs, and International Relations and Trade.

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Voting is one of the most fundamental rights guaranteed under the U.S. Constitution. I believe it is my responsibility as an elected official to ensure that legitimate votes cast by Texans are not diluted by those voting fraudulently.

Voters are losing confidence in the integrity of our election system because there appears to be multiple ways for people to commit voter fraud. Polls show that people are less likely to vote if they believe their ballot will not be fairly counted.

In Beeville, a woman was convicted of voting for her deceased mother. A former Port Lavaca city councilwoman was convicted for registering noncitizens to vote and tampering with government documents. Four people in Starr County were indicted for falsifying voter registration cards with fake addresses and the names of nonexistent voters.

These are a few examples we caught. Now it is time to change our laws to prevent other types of voter fraud.

Under current law, we do not have the tools to determine if someone is attempting to commit in-person voter fraud. Is it possible for John to vote using Bill's registration card? Absolutely. Could he cast that ballot if he had to show identification? Absolutely not.

It is not possible for every election judge to personally know every voter on the registration lists - especially in large, urban counties. We must give them the ability to know that the person voting is who they say they are when they show up at the polls.

A voter identification law is just one step in restoring voter confidence by eliminating one type of voter fraud.

In a nationwide poll conducted last October, three out of four Americans believe that voters should be required to show photo identification before being allowed to vote. Despite the overwhelming public support for voter identification laws, some try to argue that these laws are intended to suppress turnout among minorities, the poor and the elderly.

I disagree.

And the results of the November elections support my position. In Indiana, a state with a strict photo identification requirement, the turnout of Democrat voters in the November election

increased by over 8 percent - the largest of any state in the country. In contrast, the Democrat turnout in Illinois - a state with no voter identification turnout - only increased by four percent.

Everyone wants to make sure that all eligible, legal citizens are able to exercise their right to vote. Even the US Supreme Court has said that voter identification requirements are constitutional. Under the legislation I filed, no person will walk away from a polling place being able to cast a ballot.

Senate Bill 362 will require a voter to show either one form of photo identification or two other forms of non-photo identification. The non-photo identification can be a utility bill, mail from a government entity or even a library card. Even if a voter cannot show any of the acceptable forms of identification, he or she may still cast a provisional ballot upon the completion of an affidavit.

Again, I want to make it very clear, no person will walk away from a polling location without being able to cast a ballot.

The Texas Senate Committee of the Whole will be debating this legislation on Tuesday March 10th. I encourage you to let your elected officials know your thoughts on this very important issue.

Voting is one of our most important rights as Americans, but it is also a responsibility. This legislation is not a radical concept. I am just asking that every voter verify that "you are who you say you are" before casting your vote.

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